ISS MUFFET'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

SAMUEL McCHORD CROTHERS

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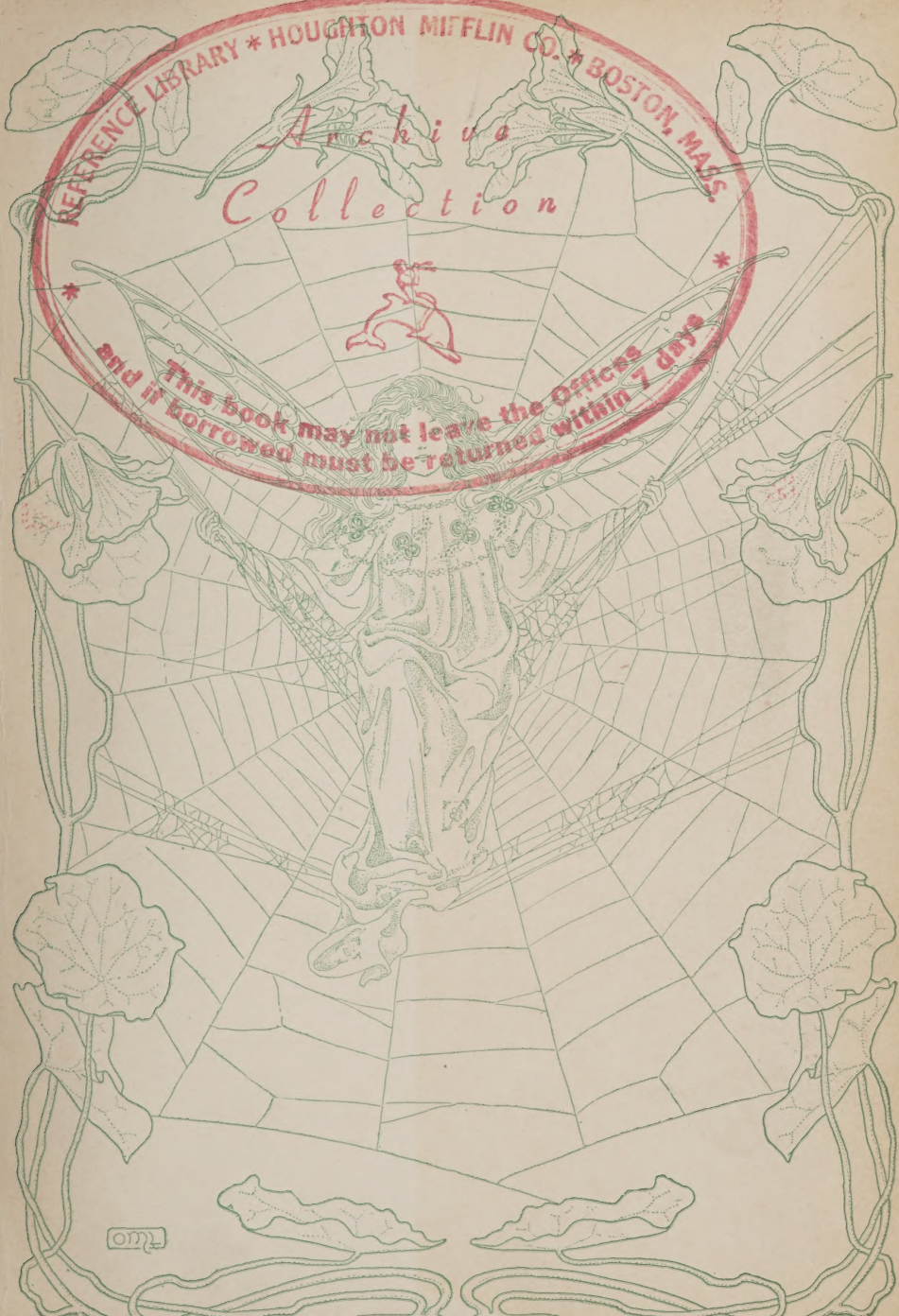

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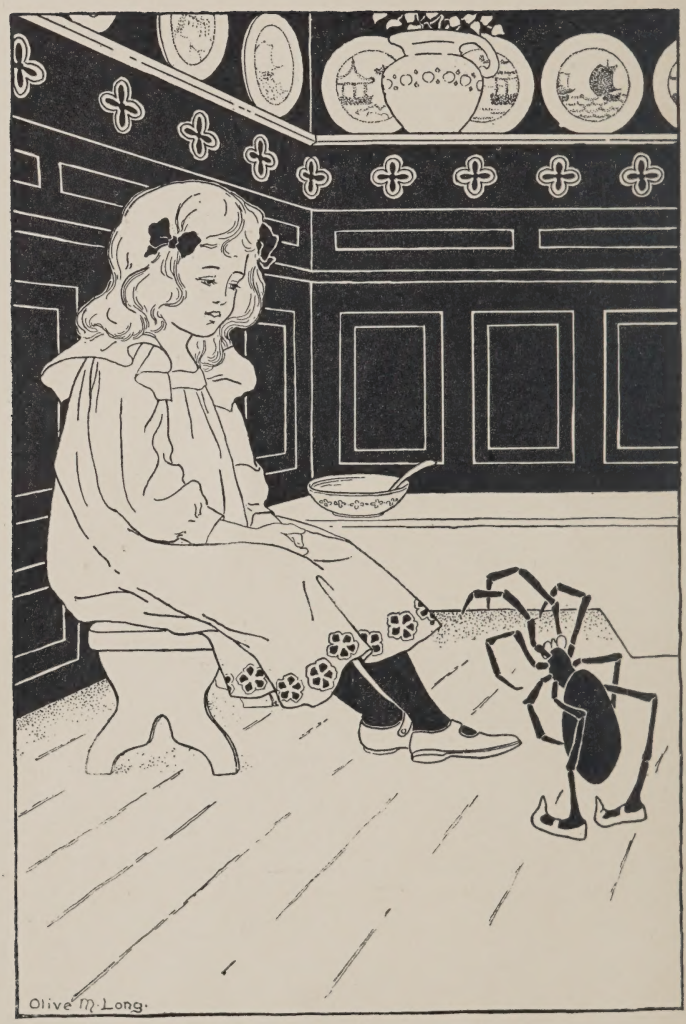

A visitor came (page 4)

MISS MUFFET'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

BY

SAMUEL McCHORD CROTHERS

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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TO MARGERY

BECAUSE, AMONG OTHER THINGS,

WE LIKE THE SAME PEOPLE

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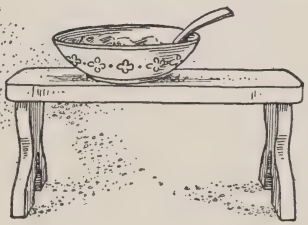
Chapter I



'T was the night before Christmas, and it was very quiet in Mrs. Muffet's house, — altogether too quiet, thought little Miss Muffet, as she sat trying to eat her curds and whey. For Mrs. Muffet was a very severe mother and had her own ideas about bringing up children, — and so had Mr. Muffet, or rather he had the same ideas, only warmed over. One of these was on the necessity of care in the diet of growing children. "First," said Mrs. Muffet, "we must find out what the children don't like, and then we must make them eat plenty of it; next to breaking their wills, there is nothing so necessary as breaking their appetites." Mrs. Muffet had read this in a book, and so she knew it must be

true; and Mr. Muffet had heard Mrs. Muffet say it so many times that he knew it was true.

Mrs. Muffet had read this in a book

So every morning little Miss Muffet had three courses: first, curds and whey; second, whey and curds; third, curdled whey. She had the same things for the other meals, but the order was changed about. An experienced housekeeper tells me that the third course is impossible to prepare, as whey cannot be curdled. All I have to say is that this housekeeper had not known Mrs. Muffet. Mrs. Muffet could curdle anything. But the worst days of the year for little Miss Muffet were the holidays, for they were occasions that had to be improved. Now for a little girl to improve an occasion is about the hardest work she can do, especially when she does n't know how. If she had been left to herself, Miss Muffet would n't have improved them at all, but would have left them in their natural state.

"Christmas," said Mrs. Muffet in her most economical tone, "comes but once a year, so we must make it go as far as possible. The best way for a child to do that is to sit and meditate. You've no idea how long a holiday seems till you sit still and think about it. Count sixty, that

To meditate on the passage of time

will be just one minute, and another, and another, and then another — sixty times one, and then sixty times that, and then twenty-four times that makes —

well — it makes — the exact number does n't matter much," said Mrs. Muffet, who was n't quick at mental arithmetic, "but you 'll see that there are quite a considerable number of seconds in Christmas Day — quite enough for any growing child." So at Christmas time Mrs. Muffet would go out to visit the neighbors, leaving the little girl seated on a very uncomfortable tuffet, to meditate on the passage of time.

The kind of thing that Miss Muffet sat on

Perhaps some of you would like to know what a tuffet is. I have thought of that myself, and have taken the trouble to ask several learned persons. They assure me that the most complete and satisfactory definition is, — a tuffet is the kind of thing that Miss Muffet sat on. With this explanation I shall go on with my story. As she sat on her tuffet counting up the seconds of Christmas Eve, and had already reached the sum of two thousand one hundred and seven, a strange thing happened. A vis-

itor came and sat down beside her. You guess who he was? Yes — an elderly, benevolent spider. He was short-sighted and wore green spectacles, and had evidently a little rheumatism in his legs, but as he had eight of them, he managed to get along very well.

Now the way you may have heard the story is that when the kind old spider sat down beside her, it frightened Miss Muffet away. That story must be true because I myself have seen it in print, but it happened at another time, when Miss Muffet was very little indeed.

On the Christmas Eve I am telling about, she had become a very sensible little girl, and knew all about spiders, so instead of running away, she made room for him on the tuffet and said, "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Spider." Mr. Spider bowed and looked at her in a kindly way through his spectacles, but said nothing.

"I hope your family are all well; I mean the family Arachnida, sub-order, I forget the name. We 've enjoyed dissecting those we could get; and you deserve a great deal of credit for the curious way in which you are put together, with your funny thorax and everything."

"Let 's change the subject, Miss," said the

spider, moving toward the further side of the tuffet. "This is Christmas Eve."

"Yes," answered Miss Muffet wearily. "Sixty

Fairly jumped off her tuffet

seconds make a minute; sixty minutes make an hour. Even Christmas Eve will come to an end some time; but what 's the good? For then Christmas will come, and that will *never* get through."

"What do you say to a party?"

Miss Muffet fairly jumped off her tuffet, for she had never had a party in her life. "Who will invite the people?"

"I will," said the spider.

"But do you think any one will come if *you* invite them?"

"Why not?"

"Oh! I was just thinking; some people are such 'fraid-cats; and then, you know, once, one of your family invited the fly to walk into his parlor. I don't believe the story one bit, but then, you know, Mr. Spider, it caused talk."

Mr. Spider positively blushed green. "If you have no objection, let 's change the subject again. Business is business; as for flies, there is a difference of opinion about them, and we can't all live on curds and whey, Miss Muffet. But this is to be your party, and we should not invite flies but folks. How would you like to have a literary party, and invite all the people you 've read about?"

"How delightful!" cried Miss Muffet gleefully. "What a dear old spider you are!"

"Let 's write the invitations immediately," said Mr. Spider, taking out of his pocket a ream of the most delicate cobweb paper.

They sat down with their heads very close together, and such a number of letters you never saw as Miss Muffet and the spider wrote. Some of them were very informal, like those beginning "Dear Little Bo-Peep" and "Dear Red Riding-Hood." They said, "Won't you come to a party at my house? We're going to have games." Others were very formal like that addressed to

The Reverend Swiss Robinson and Family,
Tent House,
Desert Island,

stating that "Miss Muffet requests the pleasure of your company," etc. Then there were letters

addressed to Wonderland and Back of the North Wind, and to Lilliput and the Land where the Jumblies Live, and to all sorts of places which are to be found only on the best maps, and are not in the school geographies at all.

Mr. Spider was very careful and businesslike, and insisted that Miss Muffet should always put down the exact address, for it would never do to have any of the letters go to the dead-letter office.

They sat down

Sometimes, however, they were puzzled to find the right direction.

"Shall I address this letter to Norwich or the Moon?" asked Miss Muffet, handing him an envelope.

"Ah!" said the spider, "this is a difficult case; it's hard to reach these traveling men. Here is a gentleman residing in the Moon, who suddenly sets out for Norwich without leaving his address. Better direct the letter to 'Norwich, General Delivery,' and write in the upper left hand corner, 'If not called for in five minutes, forward to the Moon.'"

"And I suppose that Gloucester is Dr. Foster's address? That is where I last heard of him."

"No; I'm afraid we shall have to give the doctor up. He is a very peculiar man and took a prejudice against the town, and vowed he would never go that way again."

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Miss Muffet; "it was because he didn't like the way they kept the roads."

It was a difficult matter to get the correct titles for all the princes and princesses of Fairyland, and to learn the names of all the crowned heads. Of course, where their names were in the Court Directory it was easy enough, for the spider had a huge volume at his elbow; but he said that it was far from complete. All the giant-killers and the young men who married the kings' daughters were in it, but the kings themselves were often forgotten.

"'A certain king had three daughters,'" said

Miss Muffet; "that's all that I know about him, but he ought to be invited. The postman will want to know which 'Certain King' it is, and what he's king of."

"The best way to do," said the spider, "would be to address a hundred letters, each to 'A Certain King,' asking His Majesty to honor your party with his presence, and to bring with him a 'Certain Queen.' Then whenever the messenger comes across a king without any particular name he can give him an invitation. If you want to be more definite, you may address each letter to 'A Certain Kingdom.'"

"But he has usually given away half of his kingdom."

"That's true," said the spider; "you had better address it to 'The Other Half.'"

Miss Muffet was troubled about the persons who had only lately risen in life.

"There is Dumbling, who went out to chop wood, and the dwarf gave him a golden goose that made everything stick to it. The king's daughter in that certain kingdom had been so serious that the king had offered her to any one who would make her laugh; and when she saw Dumbling with the goose under his arm and the maids and the parson and all the rest following after, she laughed out-

right. She did n't mean to, but she could n't help it. And now Dumbling is a prince, and is living happily ever afterward. I wonder if that makes any difference in his feelings, or if he likes to be called Dumbling."

The spider said that it all depended on his wife. With such a serious person as she had been one must be careful about etiquette. Because she had laughed once was no sign that she would do it again.

"Shall you invite any plain boys and girls who live in the Every Day Country?" asked the spider.

This was a hard question, for the Muffets were an old family who had come across with Mother Goose, and at this moment Every Day Country seemed a long way off and just a bit uninteresting. But then Miss Muffet remembered how many kind friends she had found there, and answered, —

"Oh, certainly, we must send invitations to the Every Day Country, for some of the folks there are just as good as the Dreamland people, only of course they have n't had the same advantages."

So letters were sent to Prudy and Dotty Dimple and the Bodley Family, and to the Little Men and Little Women and Lord Fauntleroy and the rest.

A special letter was written to the little Ruggleses, and to Tiny Tim and all the Cratchetts, for Miss Muffet knew that they were always ready to have

Every town crier in England

a good time on Christmas. A message was sent to every town crier in England, asking him to make immediate proclamation in the streets that if any small boy who was a Prince and a Pauper would make himself known, he would hear something

greatly to his advantage, for he was invited to Miss Muffet's Party.

The longest letter was that sent to Agamemnon Peterkin. Miss Muffet wrote it very carefully, underscoring all the important parts, and adding a map showing the way from the Peterkins' house to the palace. She asked him to bring all the family, including the little boys.

"I don't see how he can make a mistake," she said, "but he probably will. They are all so ingenious. They find out how to make mistakes that other folks would never think of."

"What about Mr. Henty's boys?" said the spider; "there are so many of them."

"There seem to be a great many of them," said Miss Muffet, "but I've sometimes thought that there may be only two, only they live in different centuries and go to different wars. Boys can do that, can't they, Mr. Spider, if they are very brave?"

The spider said he thought they could without changing their characters, but of course they would have to change their names.

So an invitation was sent to Ronald Leslie, alias Wulf, Roger, Lionel, Stanley, etc., On The Firing Line, Near Carthage, Quebec, Crécy, Water-

loo, Khartoum, or wherever the Enemy may be found in force. Forward by a swift messenger, trusty and true.

"I should n't wonder if they might be a little late, for they may be taken prisoner, and it always takes them some time to escape."

"Shall you invite any bad boys?" asked the spider.

"No," answered Miss Muffet severely, "not as a rule; but I think we shall ask Mr. Aldrich's Bad Boy, for he is a blighted being. I think it's our duty to have him, — and then it

would be such fun. And I suppose we ought to invite Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer to keep him company."

"Of course you will invite all the good boys?"

"Of course we shall invite them, as a rule. But the good boys in the books are almost too good sometimes; don't you think so, Mr. Spider? I mean almost too good to be true. But that reminds me; I suppose we should invite Rollo?"

"Yes," said the spider, "we certainly must invite Rollo; he's a worthy lad, and of an inquiring mind."

"Oh dear!" said Miss Muffet, tearing up the letter she had just written, "he's so intelligent. I'll have to write very correctly or he'll criticise the spelling; and then if I invite Rollo, I shall have to invite Jonas, too."

"Certainly," said the spider, "we must invite Jonas, and we must arrange some moral amusement. Suppose in your invitation you leave out the word 'party' and ask him to attend a 'serious symposium.' How would this do? — 'Respected Sir, You are earnestly requested to attend a serious symposium at Miss Muffet's, to meet the Rev. Swiss Robinson and other persons interested in the education of youth. The Little Old Woman who

lived in a Shoe will preside. There will be a number of papers, to be followed by a discussion.' "

"How good that is! Jonas would so love a discussion," said Miss Muffet.

"Shall we invite any giants?"

"No; I don't want to be exclusive, but we must draw the line somewhere. Let 's draw it at giants."

"Very well," said the spider, throwing into the waste-basket the letter he had just addressed to His Majesty the King of the Brobdingnags.

At last the invitations were all written, and the kind old spider said, "Now lie down, my dear, on the tuffet and close your eyes, and I will make all the preparations and wake you in time for the party."

Miss Muffet closed her eyes, and had already begun to dream of curds and whey, when all at once she was awakened and found herself in a most wonderful palace. The walls and floors were made of the sheerest, filmiest spider's-web, woven into a thousand delicate patterns. A soft light shone through the tapestries, and the dewdrops on the roof sparkled like diamonds. The music that

floated in through the open windows was not so much a sound as a part of the atmosphere. She was not sure whether she heard it or only breathed it in. Everything was so shimmering and so dainty that Miss Muffet might have thought that she was dreaming had it not been for the spider, who looked so comical in his dress-suit that she laughed outright. The moment she laughed, Miss Muffet knew that everything was real.

For a minute she did not dare to trust herself on the floor, but when she took a step she had the most delightful experience of walking on air. She went to one of the great windows. If the palace

Miss Muffet closed her eyes

had been wonderful, how much more wonderful was the view from it. Far as the eye could reach were the shining paths of spider's-web, each one

leading over hill and dale to the palace door. Now the paths were on the ground, now with bridges

She could catch glimpses of travelers

from grass blade to grass blade, sometimes from tree to tree; and far off she could see them spanning deep valleys among the hills. By and by she could catch glimpses of travelers on the road,

Tom Sawyer trying to "hitch on" behind

some in coaches, some on foot, some on horseback, coming by twos and dozens and scores.

"They 're coming to the party," said the spider.

Sure enough, there was Cinderella in her coach

Alice with all the strange friends she had found in Wonderland

with the Prince sitting by her side, and Tom Sawyer trying to "hitch on" behind. And there was Alice with all the strange friends she had found in Wonderland; and a very queer set they were, for Wonderland is rather out of the world, and the fashions of the Wonderlanders were peculiar, and

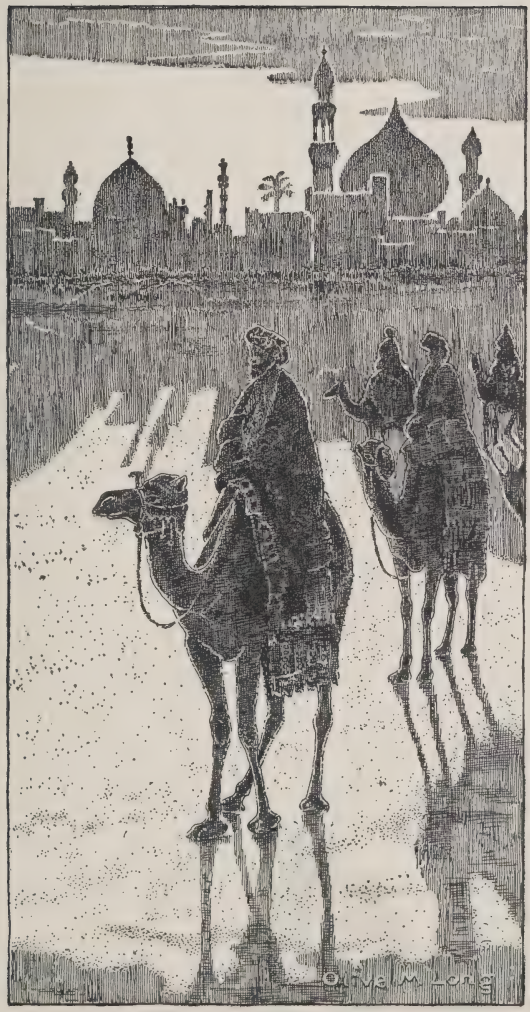
not at all like anything Miss Muffet had ever seen before. And then how they did act! It was a great relief to see, after the March Hare and the Cheshire Cat and the Duchess, who were skipping along in the most extraordinary manner, Mr. Robinson Crusoe. "He looks so solid and respectable," said Miss Muffet, "and so English, you know."

"Come to the east window," said the spider.

Miss Muffet went with him and looked out on a great level road stretching toward the sunrise. Just where it seemed to touch the sky she could see a grove of palm-trees, and she thought she could see, beyond, the golden domes and minarets of a city. But she was not quite sure of this, for it might have been the clouds. A faint perfume as of rare spices floated to her as the wind sprang up.

"This," said the spider, "is the main caravan road to Bagdad." A golden dust seemed to rise in the distance among the palms. At last Miss Muffet could see a caravan.

"Take this glass," said the spider, handing her an opera-glass. Then Miss Muffet could see very well. There were the Sultan and the Caliph and the Grand Vizier, and the silk merchants and the calenders, and the princesses of every degree, — all on camels most wonderful to behold.



"This is the main caravan road to Bagdad"

"Do you see the Forty Thieves?" asked the spider uneasily. "If you do, we'd better count the spoons."

Then Miss Muffet went to the north window, and such a sight as she saw there! There was frost on all the roads, and snow on the far mountains, and the great pine forest on that side came almost to the palace doors. And such pine-trees as they were! Each one looked like a great Christmas tree. The woods were full of merry little people, with such frosty twinkles in their eyes that it did one good to look at them. They talked Swedish and German and Icelandic and all sorts of queer languages, but somehow they laughed so naturally, and were so simple and hearty, that Miss Muffet understood every word. There were hosts of brownies and elves and fairies, and intelligent white bears, and one or two reformed wolves, and an old witch who was not nearly so bad as she looked, and the Marsh King and his daughters, and an old gentleman who looked so much like Santa Claus that Miss Muffet was sure that he must be his brother. Indeed, she could not help noticing that a great many of these North Country folks bore a strong family resemblance to Santa Claus, — but perhaps it was only

Elves

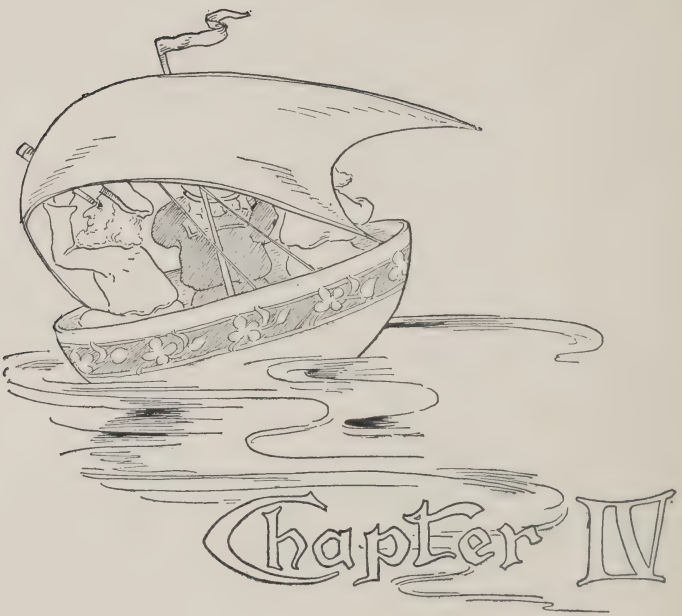
the way they wore their beards. When she saw them all, she was sorry that she had not invited Santa Claus himself. She had n't asked him, because, as she told Mr. Spider, it was Christmas Eve, and it might seem suggestive. But the truth of the matter was, as I suspect, that she thought he would probably drop in of his own accord, some time in the course of the evening.

The woods were full of merry little people

As the brisk little people from the North came up the palace steps, Miss Muffet was sure that Hans Christian Andersen must have had a party once, or how could he have described them so well? "Indeed," she said, "if I did n't know

An old witch who was not nearly so bad as she looked

what day of the month and what year it is, I should almost think that this is 'Once upon a Time.'"



When the guests began to come in, Miss Muffet was all in a flurry for fear she should not do her duty as a hostess; but she need n't have worried a bit, for they were so much interested in themselves that they paid very little attention to her. Then she had the assistance of two widely traveled storks, who, having their summer residences in Norway and spending their winters in Bagdad, had a great number of acquaintances, and introduced the Orientals to the North Country people. It was

Introduced the Orientals to the North Country people

delightful to see how quickly they all became acquainted. Little Dutch Gretchen in her wooden shoes was not at all like the Persian Princess whom she now met for the first time, but they were soon warm friends though they had moved in such different society. At first Miss Muffet was afraid that the wooden shoes might spoil the spider's-web floor; but there was no real danger of this, for the spider, knowing that there would be a very great crowd, had made everything very strong.

There was a little man in a huge bearskin coat who came from Back of the North Wind. At first he was shy and awkward, but it was beautiful to see how soon he was put at ease when Aladdin came up and explained to him the virtues of his wonderful lamp. The little man said that such a lamp must be very useful, but when it came to illuminating power it was nothing to what he had at home, for he had an Aurora Borealis in every room. Then the little man chuckled to himself, for he wanted every one to know that the Back of the North Wind Country was not so uncivilized as people supposed.

In a corner she found a delightful group of seafaring folks. Dr. Lemuel Gulliver was telling the story of one of his voyages. He was such a

matter-of-fact person, and so accurate about the latitude and longitude, that Miss Muffet had the greatest confidence in him, and felt that, though he might be mistaken in regard to the main points, all the details happened exactly as he said. His story reminded Sindbad the Sailor of something that had happened to him. He told his story in a charming oriental way, but without a touch of exaggeration.

"That would have spoiled it," said Miss Muffet to Baron Munchausen, who was standing by. "Don't you like simplicity, Baron?"

The Baron bowed in a courtly, old-fashioned way, and said that he was inordinately fond of it. Miss Muffet heard a rippling, liquid sound which she at first mistook for laughter, but the Baron assured her that it was only the frozen truth beginning to thaw. This reminded him of a little incident which was wonderful to hear. Everybody was astonished except the Three Wise Men of Gotham. They remarked that if they were at liberty to tell their adventures, as seafaring men, the stories that had been told would seem quite tame; but they did n't feel at liberty, and only looked at each other so wisely that Miss Muffet wondered whether any persons could really be as wise as they looked.

Aladdin explains the virtues of his lamp

A sturdy, round-faced man stood just behind the group, but took no part in the conversation. Whenever Sindbad was talking he became so excited that his eyes seemed almost to pop out of his head, but he quieted down as soon as any one else began. After a time Sindbad came over to him, and taking out his purse, gave him a handful of gold pieces.

"Listening . . . is hard on the eyes"

"A hundred sequins?" asked Miss Muffet.

"Yes," said the round-faced man, "that 's my regular wages."

"It must be a very large amount."

He said he had no complaint to make, though a sequin did n't go so far in Bagdad as it once did, and he had to spend a great deal in clothes.

"I knew the minute I saw you that you must be Hindbad the Porter."

"I used to be a porter before I became a professional listener. Listening is n't so hard on the back as portering, but it requires more attention and the hours are longer; that is, they seem longer. Besides, it 's hard on the eyes."

"You mean on the ears," suggested Miss Muffet.

"No! on the eyes; you have to look interested."

"Oh! I understand," said Miss Muffet. "When first I heard about your being invited to dinner at Sindbad's and listening to his first tale, it seemed the very nicest thing in the world. And how unexpected it was, after you had enjoyed it, for him to hand you a hundred sequins and say, 'Take this, Hindbad, and return to your home, and come back to-morrow and hear more of my adventures.' Were n't you surprised to hear a story and get a hundred sequins besides?"

Hindbad said that he was surprised at first, but after a day or two he began to look at it more in a business way. He had always made it a rule to be thorough, for whatever was worth doing was worth doing well, and he determined to be the very best listener in Bagdad.

"You see, in my country, we have a great many gentlemen who gain wealth by having adventures.

When they come back from their shipwrecks, they naturally want to tell about them; but there 's so much competition that it 's hard to get a hearing. When they meet with people, like those horrid Wise Men of Gotham, who prefer their own shipwrecks, they go into a decline."

His eyes filled with tears, and Miss Muffet was sure that he was one of the most sympathetic men in the world.

"Now I had a great advantage," he went on; "I never had a shipwreck of my own, so that I could not be reminded of something that would make me interrupt. And then it is easy for me to have a story seem strange. I seem to have a natural gift for it. Any one can be surprised the first time he hears an adventure, but if one is to become a professional listener he must cultivate the habit of being surprised. Now that story about the roc's egg grows upon me; indeed it does! I don't think I appreciated it at first. That 's the way with all big things; it 's some time before you take them in. Even Mr. Sindbad says that it did n't seem as big when he saw it as it does now when he remembers it. And whenever I hear about those huge serpents it makes me shudder, and I ask Mr. Sindbad to hurry on and tell me that

he really did get away from them. I can't stand the suspense. The cannibals are frightful creatures, Miss Muffet; they say they eat people. Mr. Sindbad has a perfect genius for having accidents. They come in the most unexpected places. And then he escapes. I sometimes think that is the most wonderful part of it."

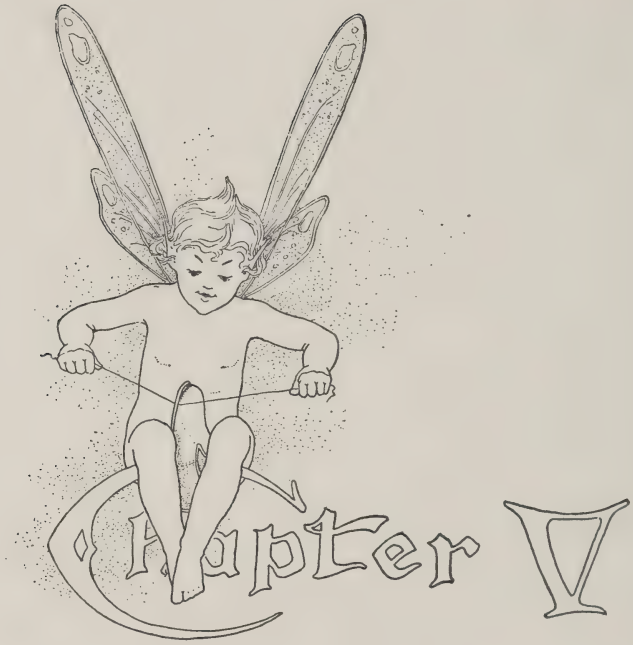
"Do you think a little girl who studied hard could learn your profession and practice in Bagdad?" asked Miss Muffet timidly. "You know I would n't ask for wages; I would do it just for the love of it."

Hindbad frowned darkly. "It would never do, Miss Muffet! I can't have little girls coming over on the banks of the Tigris and taking the bread out of the mouths of my family."

But when he saw that Miss Muffet was beginning to cry, he changed his tone and said, "I am sure you meant no harm, only you did n't understand about the wages. You could easily earn a hundred sequins at listening, and it is n't so hard to learn when you are young. I would give that much myself to have you listen to a queer thing that happened to me once in Bagdad. I 've never told it before, for I never found any one who looked interested. It was in one of the narrowest streets

down by the water-side, and it was on the darkest night of the year, when " —

Just then the spider came to take Miss Muffet away to meet some children who came from The Golden Age. Their names were Harold and Edward and Charlotte, and they said they had an Aunt Maria, who had stayed at home because she had not been invited to the party. They had walked all the way along the Roman Road, which made the spider think that they must be tired. In this he was mistaken ; though they said that they were ready for the refreshments.



The Golden Age children said that they did n't like to play with grown folks; after people got to be thirty or ninety they thought they became very uninteresting, and did n't have the right kind of feelings; unless they were Princes and went on adventures.

Miss Muffet did n't agree with this because some of her best friends were elderly peasants whose faces were all puckered up because they had been

The shyest persons in the room

smiling for so many years. She wished, though, that they were not so shy.

"I suppose it's because they are not used to going to parties; neither am I, for that matter, but then I'm not so much used as they are to *not* going."

Perhaps the shyest persons in the room were an old German shoemaker and his wife, whom Miss Muffet had for a long time loved and admired, though they had not known it. Indeed, they did n't know that any one was ever admired unless he had found a pot of gold or done something equally praiseworthy. The shoemaker had never done anything but make shoes, and his wife did the cooking and made the clothes for the family. When they received the invitation to the party, they were greatly astonished and thought it must be a mistake, but the village priest, who read the letter, told them that it was certainly intended for them, though why they were invited was a mystery. When the priest told them that it was a mystery, they knew that it was so, and came along bowing and curtsying as if all the persons they met were their betters, though really only one or two were half so good. Miss Muffet ran to them and put her hands in theirs.

"I have just loved you since the time I heard what you did for the little elves who used to come at night after you had gone to bed and finish your work for you. Some people take what's done for them and think no more about it except that they 're lucky; but you sat up till midnight and peeped

Scampering off into the dark

into the room where the elves were working, and saw that they did n't have enough clothes to keep them warm. Then you made each one a shirt and a coat and waistcoat and a pair of trousers and a little pair of shoes. What fun it must have been, next night, to watch them putting on their things and scampering off into the dark. I never heard of elves being dressed up like that."

The shoemaker and his wife laughed heartily as they remembered how funny the elves were. The wife confessed that the garments did n't fit closely, though she made them like her husband's, only smaller.

"Elves are not so square, are they?" asked Miss Muffet.

"No," said the shoemaker's wife; "but their clothes are. That 's the only pattern I have."

"I suppose they are coming to the party? I sent a general invitation to Elf-land. There is to be elfin music and a frolic for them. I thought they might like it better to have their own games. Your elves can't say they have nothing to wear, because that would n't be true."

But though she looked everywhere for them, nowhere could she see the little elves in square coats and trousers. When the refreshments were served,

Mr. Spider noticed that everything went remarkably smoothly, and there was more of all kinds of provisions than he had ordered. He said he had no doubt but that the little elves were helping in the kitchen.

"It would be just like them; the little dears!" said Miss Muffet.

The shoemaker felt very much more at home when he met a young fellow named Hans who had come from the same village. He was not the Hans who married Grettel, but the one whom Miss Muffet had often heard of because he traded a horse for a cow, the cow for a pig, the pig for a goose, and so on, all the way home. This caused a good deal of talk in the neighborhood, and some of the villagers thought he was n't much of a business man.

Hans, however, was perfectly satisfied with himself, and was quite ready to talk.

"The secret of being a trader," he said, "is to be quick about it. You must not stop to think: that 's where you lose time. If I had stopped to think, I should have brought the horse home with me, and I might have had it on my hands yet. There are ever so many people grumbling about the care of their property; they say it is a burden

to them. I tell them that it 's all their own fault. If they kept their eyes open, they would find plenty of ways of getting rid of it."

Hans had such a shrewd twinkle in his eyes that Miss Muffet felt sure that he would always get the best of a bargain, no matter how it turned out.

While Hans was talking, she noticed a little man who looked like a tailor.

" Did n't you start on a journey once," she asked, " with only a piece of cheese and an old hen in your wallet ? "

" Yes," he answered ; " but that was a good while ago."

" I thought you must be the one. And you fooled the giant, and when he squeezed a stone till water came out of it, you squeezed your cheese till the whey ran out, and he thought your cheese was a stone, and that you squeezed harder than he did. And he never saw through any of your tricks, though I should have thought that even a giant would have suspected. Are all giants so stupid ? "

The tailor said that not all of them were so stupid, though fortunately a great many were, and generally when they grew beyond a certain size, something happened to their heads.

" If it were n't for that, Miss Muffet, there would

be no room for us common people on the earth. The giants would eat up everything. Now and then there is a young giant like Thumbling who is active and keeps his wits about him. But Thumbling was very little to begin with. Most giants get foolish when they grow up, and then we can put an end to them."

When the talk got upon giants, it was astonishing to see what an eager crowd gathered around the tailor. There were some knights in armor who listened unconcernedly, for they knew that giants could do them no harm; but it was different with the tailors and fishermen and ploughmen. They had suffered so much that they could not speak of a giant without bitterness.

"But are n't there good giants?" asked Miss Muffet.

"I never heard of one," said the tailor, "except Christopher, and he is a saint and learned how to fast. It is n't a question of their being good: the trouble with them is that they are too big. It takes too much to support them. They eat us out of house and home. We can't get along peaceably till we are all more of a size."

They were all of that opinion, and the stories which they applauded were of the kind where a

little man gets the better of a big one. Miss Muffet could not object to this, because it was the kind she liked best herself.

"I never have been so much afraid of giants," she said, "since I learned about their diseases. They are not nearly so strong as they look. There was Giant Despair, — 'in sunshiny weather he fell into fits.' It was while he was having a fit, you know, that Christian and Hopeful got away. If I were going where there were bad giants, I should go in sunshiny weather."

"I don't think you would have any trouble, my dear," said the shoemaker, "for you would take the sunshine with you."

And then he laughed to think of Giant Despair tumbling over in a fit when he caught sight of Miss Muffet. For though the shoemaker was a very kind man, he had no sympathy for giants.

Chapter VI

THERE were so many interesting things going on at the party that Miss Muffet almost forgot the Serious Symposium. When she did remember it, she was very much troubled.

"What will Rollo think about me for being so negligent! I invited him particularly to come to a symposium, and now I don't even know how it is done."

The spider, however, told her that he had secured a hall up two flights, and had arranged the chairs and a table, which were all the arrangements neces-

"I am sorry to be so late"

sary for a meeting. He had seen a number of serious persons going upstairs, and he had no doubt that it was a success.

When she reached the hall, the papers had all been read and discussed, and the Little Old Woman, who was in the chair, was just announcing that the next business before the house was to adjourn.

"I am sorry to be so late," said Miss Muffet, "and to miss hearing the papers."

"If that 's the case," said the Little Old Woman, "we will have them all over again. The speakers will read slowly, so that the papers will go further."

"Oh, please don't on my account!" cried Miss Muffet, all in a tremble. "Don't let me interfere with your adjourning. I know that must be important business."

The Little Old Woman said that it was the most important business of the meeting.

"Does it take long?" asked Miss Muffet.

"Not if you know how to do it," said the Little Old Woman.

"Then I will just sit down and watch it."

The Little Old Woman rapped upon the table with a huge button-hook, and went about the

business so briskly that before Miss Muffet knew what had happened, the meeting had adjourned.

"Were the papers so quick?" she asked.

"No, they were n't; papers are never that way."

"What were they about?"

"The white ones were about 'Child Study,' and the yellow ones were about 'Obedience to Parents' and 'Not Losing Your Thimble.' The yellow ones were the ones I knew best; I used to have them when I was a little girl."

"Then the white ones must be harder. Is Child Study harder than Arithmetic?"

"There are two kinds. One kind is where you take the children you are acquainted with and tell what you know about them. That kind is n't so good to make papers out of. It 's too short. The other kind is where you get at 'the Contents of the Child's Mind.' I can't say that it 's harder than Arithmetic, for it is Arithmetic, only it 's further on than you've got. It 's percentage. You take eleven hundred little girls in blue dresses and make them fill out blanks. You ask them which they like best, chocolate caramels or peppermint drops."

"Which *do* they like best?" asked Miss Muffet, who had often thought about that question herself.

"You can't tell," answered the Little Old Wo-

man; "all you know is the answers: they depend on which words the little girls can spell easiest. The chief thing is to get the percentage. Then you write a paper. If it does n't come out right, you ask eleven hundred little girls in pink dresses and they answer differently. Then you have a Problem."

"What is a Problem?" asked Miss Muffet.

"It 's something to discuss," said the Little Old Woman.

"Why don't they ask their mothers?"

"The mothers are too busy. Besides, their children are all exceptions. You can't make anything out of exceptions, — there are too many of them. If you let them in, it just musses up the Science. The best way is to keep them out."

"But their mothers like them," said Miss Muffet.

"Yes; they think that they are the nicest kind."

When she had time to look around her, Miss Muffet was surprised to see how different the company was from that in the other parts of the palace.

"They look as if something had been done to them," said Miss Muffet. "Oh! now I know who they are! They must be Youths. I've always read about Youths in the books mamma makes me read on Sunday afternoon, but I did n't know that

they were real. Some of them look almost like boys and girls, only less so."

Sure enough, the room was full of Youths. They came out of the Sunday-school books and the Fifth Readers and the Moral Tales and the Libraries of Instructive Juvenile Literature. Some had never been out of a book before, and found it impossible to talk in anything but the book language. Some were evidently very good, and some were painful examples of youthful wickedness, while others were chiefly interested in Natural History.

"Youths," said the Little Old Woman, "are easier to understand than boys and girls and other young folks. Youths have habits, and each one practices only one at a time. When they do a naughty thing, they keep on doing it regularly; that's the way you come to know which is which. It does n't matter what it is, whether Vanity or Procrastination or Not Bringing in the Wood, they keep it up till they have been made to see the folly of it, or are given over to their evil ways. Now children are more changeable. When I lived in a Shoe, I was driven half out of my wits, for I never could be thorough when I reproved them, they were always naughty in a different way. I don't believe that any one could have got any of my

children into a book; they would n't keep still long enough to have their characters taken."

Almost all the Youths were accompanied by their parents or guardians, though some had private tutors. Two youthful persons from the eighteenth century attracted a great deal of attention. They were Harry Sandford and Tommy Merton. Harry was a great philosopher, and understood so perfectly the principles of the Wedge and the Inclined Plane and the Moral Law that it was hard to believe his friend, Mr. Barlow, who stated that he was only six years old. Tommy, on the other hand, until his sixth year had been quite worldly, and had held a number of erroneous opinions. Under Harry's instruction, however, he had been much improved and was now quite sedate and observing.

Somehow the painful examples appealed to Miss Muffet most, for she was very tender-hearted. There was the little criminal who once stole a pin. Miss Muffet had always understood that a pin was the very worst thing to steal; it had such fearful consequences. The last consequence generally is that one is transported. And there was an example of youthful obstinacy who would n't pronounce the letter G. His mother was almost broken-hearted for fear he might take a prejudice against other

letters of the alphabet. She sat up three nights with him and spent days trying to make him say G.

"It shows that she was a good mother, does n't it?" said Miss Muffet.

"It shows that she did n't have to do her own work," replied the Little Old Woman.

A group of very old-fashioned children were talking together in whispers. They were evidently anxious that no older persons should hear them.

"There they are at it again," said the Little Old Woman; "they are Mrs. Opie's children. People don't know them so well now, but they used to be notorious for telling White Lies. I have no doubt that they are doing it now; they are exaggerating."

"What 's that?" asked Miss Muffet.

"It 's telling how large a thing is before you 've measured it."

"But what if you have n't a tape-line with you?"

"Then you should say nothing about it."

"There is Hal," said Miss Muffet; "I know him by the miserable piece of string hanging out of his pocket. Hal cut his string. It was a sin and he suffers for it. His cousin Ben untied his and has

it always ready for emergencies. All his emergencies are of that kind; they need a piece of whipcord to bring them out right. I 've no doubt but that to-night the coach of one of the very prettiest princesses will break down and Ben will tie it up. It would be just his luck."

Of course it was not long before Miss Muffet sought out Rollo Halliday.

"I always did like Rollo," she said. "I almost forget that he is a Youth sometimes. The nicest thing about him is that you always know what he means. He always tells you where he is and how he got there, without skipping anything that you ought to know. When he goes into a room, he goes through the door, opening and shutting the door just as you expected. He is n't at all like Humpty Dumpty. I don't think

Hal cut his string

I ever knew two persons more different. There was only one time when he puzzled me. When he went to Europe, and they told him how the French did things, 'Rollo laughed long and loud.' It was so unusual. I read it over and over, but I could n't tell what he laughed at. I think he might have explained, but I suppose he forgot."

It certainly was a pleasant thing to see Rollo surrounded by a group of kindred spirits. They were the healthiest and happiest Youths in the company, for they had lived a great deal in the open air, and had kept their eyes open.

Rollo was engaged in a dispute with little Francis about the comparative merits of New England and a Desert Island for farming. Jonas said little, but what he did say carried great weight.

Rollo expressed himself as highly pleased with the Symposium. He was sorry that there was not time for a paper on "The New Boy" and a discussion of the question, "Are not the Young Growing Younger?" He said he had seen some dangerous tendencies in that direction.

Having said this, Rollo walked to the other side of the room, and having found a settee, sat down on it.

Scarcely had Rollo sat down when Miss Muffet saw a little girl whose face was very familiar.

"I don't think I ever knew two persons more different"

"You are Rosamond, are n't you? And once you bought a beautiful purple jar instead of shoes, even though your old shoes had holes in them?"

"It was a youthful indiscretion," said Rosamond, "and I have learned a lesson from it."

"It was just lovely. Any one can have shoes, but a purple jar is something one dreams about; it 's almost as good as having a party."

Then she looked very anxiously at Rosamond and said, —

"I hope it did n't happen to you? Since first I read the story Miss Edgeworth told about you and the purple jar, I could n't get out of my head the dreadful lines with which she begins, —

> 'O teach her while your lessons last
> To judge the future by the past,
> The mind to strengthen and anneal
> While on the stithy glows the steel.'

It seemed such a dreadful thing to have your mind annealed, and you so little. I 'm sure it 's something uncomfortable. And then how hard it was for your mamma to make you *choose* to do all the unpleasant things. I don't mind doing them when I 'm told to, but to have to choose them rumples up my mind. That must have been an awful time when you had to choose a needle-book instead of that funny stone plum that you could have fooled the boys with."

"But Mamma wanted to train me to be a Free Moral Agent," said Rosamond.

"I don't like agents," said Miss Muffet, and then she was sorry that she had been so rude. "I mean I don't believe in being one till one is more grown up. And now that we are talking about

it, maybe you could tell me what the other line means, —

'While on the stithy glows the steel.'"

"You dear little Rosamond"

"A stithy," said Rosamond, "is a kind of blacksmith shop."

"Now I know what every word means," said Miss Muffet, "but what was it all about?"

"It was poetry."

"I suppose that this evening you had to choose between the Symposium and the rest of the party where they don't have papers? And you are glad you chose the Symposium?"

"No, I 'm not," said Rosamond impulsively.

"You dear little Rosamond!" cried Miss Muffet, throwing her arms about her. "The annealing 's come off. Now let 's go where there 's music."

Chapter VII

As she returned from the Symposium, Miss Muffet was compelled to pass through some of the more remote parts of the palace, and whom should she see but the Caliph Haroun al Raschid, whom she recognized at once because he was in full disguise. He had no sooner come to the party than he had begun to poke around in search of adventures, as was his habit. At length he found two little girls engaged in a violent quarrel over a lamb. One was beating the other over the head with a crook, and accusing her of theft. This was just

what the Caliph was after, and summoning the girls before him, he prepared to try the case. The younger girl, whose name was Mary, testified that the lamb had followed her to school. The elder girl, known as Bo-Peep, stated that on that same day she had lost her whole flock of sheep.

"This is a strange coincidence," said Haroun al Raschid: "one girl loses her sheep and another has one in her possession. There is a great mystery here that must be looked into. Appear before me to-morrow, little girls, and tell me your stories." And then he added, with a terrible frown and an expressive glance at the executioner, — "And be sure, little girls, that your stories are interesting."

Miss Muffet had hoped to have a long quiet talk with Haroun al Raschid and to ask him ever so many questions. But when she saw the executioner she changed her mind, and she felt, too, that the Caliph was more used to asking questions than to answering them.

It was a great relief, therefore, to see a Dervish sitting on the floor, as if he had all the time in the world. He did n't seem in the least afraid of Haroun al Raschid; for Dervishes are great people in their way and have no need of being afraid of anybody.

One was beating the other

"Good-evening, Mr. Dervish, may I sit down by you and have a little talk about dervishry?"

The Dervish said something she did n't quite understand about not talking shop on social occa-

A little talk about dervishry

sions. "However," he added, "I will be glad to tell about my neighbors; that will be more polite." This suited Miss Muffet just as well.

"It's what I really want to hear about," she said. "Dervishry must be very hard work when you do it well, but it gives you a chance to meet all the interesting people. Let me see; you have a bowl, and you sit under a palm-tree by a well, and then the Calendars and Cadis and Muftis and Merchants and Mendicants and the ladies of Bagdad come and ask you questions, and when they put things in your bowl you answer them?"

The Dervish said that that would be against the rule.

"Oh, I remember. You look wise and tell them to come again to-morrow. The next day they come again, and you tell them which camel was blind in one eye and where their lovers are. That is very wonderful."

The Dervish said that was the easiest part of it. The hardest thing was to look wiser than the Muftis.

Very soon they were having a delightful talk about all the great personages Miss Muffet had always admired at a distance, but the Dervish had known them intimately and could tell all their weak points, which were not in the books. Indeed, Miss Muffet was surprised to find how many mistakes the books had in them, all because the per-

An expressive glance at the executioner

sons who made them had n't taken the trouble to talk with the Dervish. Almost all the numbers were wrong.

"There were n't forty thieves, there were only thirty-nine. I counted them myself."

"But did n't everything else happen as I was told?" asked Miss Muffet; "and did n't it come out as it is in the book?"

The Dervish admitted this, but said that that was n't the important part: the important part was to count straight.

A remarkable discovery was that all the famous people had brothers, and the brothers were always the ones who ought to have been famous, but every one forgot about them.

"There is Aladdin, he 's a greatly overrated man. I could tell you some curious things I learned about him. I know they are true, for they were told to me in confidence. People admire him because they think he is so lucky. Now if it had been his brother! He came over from China and used to sit by the day under my palm-tree talking about the chances he had just missed. They were truly marvelous. He missed more chances than Aladdin ever dreamed of, but nobody ever writes about him."

"Perhaps they don't know about him," said Miss Muffet.

"That's the injustice of it."

"Speaking of brothers, did you ever find out why it is that the third one is always the wisest? I asked one of the North Country princes about it just now, and he bowed and said he thanked me for the compliment, but he was no philosopher. It doesn't matter where it is, in the Red Fairy Book or the Green Fairy Book or any color, the third is always the charm, and it seems very much the same way in your country. The oldest brother is always vain and selfish, and when he goes into the forest, always does the very thing he was told not to. And the second brother is selfish, and stupider, for he ought to know better when his brother doesn't come back and there are so many witches around. Then it comes to the third brother, and I never expect anything of him because he is so little and his stepmother has kept him back, but he turns out splendid. Did you ever meditate on that, Mr. Dervish?"

The Dervish said that he had meditated on it for a great many years, and had at last come to the conclusion that it was a law of nature.

"I am so glad to know that," said Miss Muffet, "for it has always troubled me."

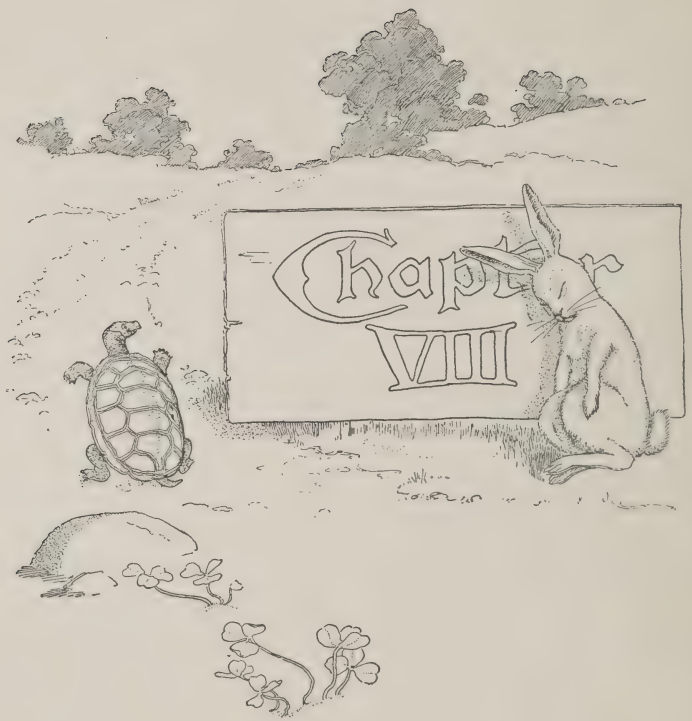
Aladdin's brother and the Dervish

The Dervish remarked that when one was troubled by that kind of questions, it was always better to consult a wise man at once. It was not safe to let the case run on.

"There's another thing I should like to ask about. Since I first read of the Three Royal Mendicants, I 've always wondered what a Mendicant is. I know he must be very proud and great, but what does he do? The Mendicants are here this evening, but I don't like to ask them; it might seem rude."

Then the Dervish explained about the Mendicants, and seemed so familiar with their way of life that Miss Muffet suspected that he might have been one himself. He explained too about the Calendars.

The time passed so rapidly that Miss Muffet would have talked with him all the evening, had he not at last said that he feared he was monopolizing the attention of his hostess; besides, it was about time for him to do some more meditating.



THERE was a surprise at the party that delighted many of the young people. Old Mr. Esop passed through the hall, distributing handbills, announcing that, at immense expense, he had brought from Greece his unparalleled aggregation of Fables, which would now be open for exhibition in a grand pavilion just outside the south door of the palace. Out of compliment to Miss Muffet's party, admis-

sion to the Fables would be free, though ten cents would be charged to those who remained to the Morals, — which, I am sorry to say, very few did. Some of the Fables were unusually terrifying, such as the Lions and the hungry Wolves, and Miss Muffet was glad to see what strong bars there were to their cages. But a number of the Fables, having been for a long time on exhibition, had become quite tame, and walked about conversing so amiably that the youngest children felt no apprehension.

It was while Mr. Esop was engaged in attaching the Morals to the Fables that Miss Muffet caught sight for the first time of Uncle Remus and the Little Boy. Mr. Esop was pointing out the Hare asleep by the wayside while the Tortoise was coming gayly down the home stretch, and he was about to exhibit the Moral when Uncle Remus broke out with a hearty laugh.

"You don't fool dis chile, does you, honey? Brer Rabbit he sometime play 'possum, but he sleep wid one eye open; he not let hisself be beat by a triflin' mud turtle. Jess when Brer Turtle thinks he 's thar, Brer Rabbit 'll give a jump, an' Brer Turtle 'll find he's jess in time to be too late. Oh! I know Brer Rabbit's owdacious ways." But

still the Hare slept while the Tortoise came deliberately over the line. Then Uncle Remus cried out with infinite scorn, "Come along, little boy; dat ain't worth shucks; dat ain't Brer Rabbit, nohow. I 'low dat rabbit 's stuffed."

"But, Uncle Remus," said Miss Muffet, "perhaps you will like the Fables better when you get acquainted with them. I 'm sure they have always borne a good reputation. And now I should like to introduce you to Mr. Esop; it 's such a pleasure to bring together people of the same tastes. Mr. Esop, allow me to introduce my friend, Mr. Remus. I am sure that you will feel a common interest in Zoölogy."

Miss Muffet felt a little frightened at making such a formal speech, but she knew that she was showing the quality called "tact," which is something very useful in a hostess. To tell one's guests what they are expected to talk about is often a great convenience to them.

But Mr. Esop, the moment he heard the name, drew back with an air that was quite chilling and businesslike.

"Another of those early Romans out of a job! He has just discovered that he is a Fable and is looking for a situation." Then turning to Uncle

Remus he said, "I 'm very particular about my Fables, and I want everything straight and plain so that parents may have no hesitation in bringing their children. I don't like to mix up Myths with my Fables, for the chances are that the Mythical Personage, instead of having a Moral, may turn out to be only a Sign of the Zodiac. This is always confusing to the Public. I suppose, Mr. Remus, that you have brought Mr. Romulus with you. In the case of twins, I give no consideration, if I 'm offered only a broken lot. I must have the full set, Mr. Remus."

"I must have the full set"

Uncle Remus's feelings would have been much hurt if he had not at that moment caught sight

of Mowgli accompanied by Baloo and Bagheera. Just how it happened Miss Muffet could never find out, but before she had time to introduce them they had become fast friends, and Uncle Remus only chuckled when she asked him if she might have the pleasure of making them acquainted.

"Nebber you mind 'bout us, we mus' hab met befo'. I disremember whar, but it mus' hab been somewhar down de big road."

And the old man laughed at the thought that there ever was a time when he did n't know Mowgli.

At the mention of the big road Mowgli began to sing the "Road Song of the Bandar-log." It was a very strange song, and not at all like those that her music teacher taught her, but for all that Miss Muffet felt that it was just the kind of a song she would sing if she were a Bandar-log.

Uncle Remus was in an ecstasy, and the Little Boy shouted for joy. Every one praised it except Sandford and Merton, who said that it did n't give any useful information except that monkeys had tails, a fact which was already well known, being mentioned in all the Natural History books. For their part, when it came to poetry they preferred some fine passages in Dr. Young's "Night Thoughts."

A great many boys and girls who were on their

way to the pavilion had remained outside listening to a pleasant gentleman who was telling them anecdotes about the Wild Animals he had known.

This troubled Mr. Esop, who, though an excellent man, was inclined to be jealous. Miss Muffet went out to remind the children of the Morals, but in a little while she became as interested as the rest of them.

Telling anecdotes

"His way of talking is different from Mr. Esop's, but I am not sure but he may be right. At any rate, I am glad to hear some one who speaks respectfully about animals, and who does n't say anything behind their backs that he would n't say to their faces. He always remembers that they are persons and have feelings. Then when they do things, he does n't blame them or call them bad names. That 's one thing I don't like about Mr. Esop. He is n't quite fair, and he is always accusing them of Folly."

"It 's remarkable how small the world is, after

all," said the pleasant gentleman, when more than a score of persons told him that the Wild Animals he had known were among their most intimate acquaintances, and that they had met them under a great many different circumstances. Then followed a good deal of gossip about their family life and the way they got their living. Miss Muffet was glad to hear that they were all so kind to their children, but the way they got their living troubled her. She remembered what the spider said, that "business is business," but that did n't make it seem any more kind.

"It 's the Law of the Jungle," said Mowgli; and then he recited the law word for word just as he had learned it.

"Can't they change it?" asked Miss Muffet.

"The Jungle people can't. It 's too strong for them."

From this the conversation drifted to hunting for sport. The pleasant gentleman who knew so many animals personally did n't like it. The Boy Hunters, who had spent a great deal of time in the woods, did n't agree with him. They said that the proper way to become acquainted with animals was to carry a gun. It showed that you entered into the spirit of the thing. They fancied that it was

good for wild animals to be hunted; in fact, that was what kept them wild.

Miss Muffet did n't think that was a very good reason, though it sounded logical; and she asked several of the Animals what they thought about it.

A Duck, a Dodo, a Lory, and an Eaglet, who had come with Alice from Wonderland, were the nearest, and she asked them first, but they refused to answer on the ground that they never had thoughts so late in the evening. The Lory said that he had one at home, but he had forgotten to bring it.

"It all depends on grammar"

"You can't make anything out of these Wonderland creatures," said Miss Muffet. "I can't really feel that they are animals I have known, though of course I know their names."

When Bagheera was asked his opinion, he only growled that it was all in the day 's work. But wise old Baloo answered: —

"It all depends on grammar."

This made every one look very solemn, for they realized now that it was a serious matter.

"First Person, Singular, I hunt. Second Person, Thou huntest. Third Person, He or She hunts. So long as you confine it to the First Person, it's proper and right. When you go beyond that, it's carrying it too far. When you get to the Second Person, that's where the danger comes in."

This was such sound sense that they all agreed to it, though Mr. Wolf declared that the First Person, Plural, seemed to him to be more sociable.

"Does it make any difference about the moods and tenses?" asked Miss Muffet.

"Passive — First Person, Singular, I am hunted."

There was a general cry of horror. "What a dreadful point of view!" said the Dodo; "it makes me shiver to think about it."

Even the wildest animals agreed that it was atrocious. What was most remarkable was that the Boy Hunters, who had been on the Orinoco and the Congo and all the most dangerous places, admitted that they had the same feelings.

"There's a limit beyond which hunting is not true sport. It should not be allowed to go as far as the First Person, Singular, in the Passive."

"I'm so glad that you agree about it," said Miss Muffet. "I knew you would when you came to understand one another. That 's the great good of being at parties; it makes us feel that we are all more alike than we thought."

Chapter IX

When Miss Muffet began to be a little tired, Mr. Spider asked her to take a stroll with him into the open air. So he led her through a low archway which brought them at last into the Child's Garden of Verses.

"We had to make the entrance quite small," he said apologetically, "to keep out the big boys. They run over everything, and we should have to put up those horrid signs, 'Keep off the Verses.'"

"I am so glad that you have brought me into the garden where I can see the verses growing.

Wynken, Blynken, and Nod

Mamma told me that people make verses just as they make the flowers on her bonnet. But I like the kind that grow, don't you, Mr. Spider?"

Mr. Spider said that he was no judge of poetry, but he was inclined to be of her opinion; which made Miss Muffet very happy, for she had not been used to having people agree with her, — at least before she had a party.

It was very pleasant in the garden, for the noisier children had not found it out. It was surprising how many things were in it. There was a little river with golden sand; and the tiniest mountain, which looked as high as the sky when you got the right point of view; and there were ships and pirates and a beautiful cow. When you looked in the right direction, you could see the big world stretching away much further than the eye could reach.

Miss Muffet watched a wide-eyed little boy who was wandering about and having such an adventurous time as never was. Everything was so great and strange, yet he was n't a bit afraid, only now and then when he turned a corner he was a little prudent, as any traveler would be who had come to the end of the world and was not sure that the next step might not take him off the edge. But it

He was a little prudent

never did, for no matter how far he went, there was always a next step for him, as if the good Scotch gardener who had laid out the paths had known that such a great traveler was coming. As

The Rockaby Lady saying good-night

she left the garden she heard him singing to himself his glad little song, —

> "The world is so full of a number of things,
> I think we should all be as happy as Kings."

The idea of the little song was exactly the same that Miss Muffet had had in her head for a long time, though she had n't been able to express it so well. Even after she came back to the company, she kept repeating the words to herself.

"I think the nicest part about being happy," she confided to the spider, "is that it keeps you from being lonesome, and it makes you like such a number of things."

"And such a number of people," added Mr. Spider.

"Yes; all the different kinds. It 's not because they are so very pretty. You like the queer ones too, and you are glad that the world 's full of them. There 's Rumpelstiltzkin, he 's not at all like anybody else, and his features are n't regular, but I 'm glad he came to the party. He 's so interesting."

Mr. Spider was sure that if he could get every one to feel that way, it would make life easier for the members of his own family. He agreed that

Flew away . . . into the night

the way to keep people from being cruel was to make them happy in their own minds.

"And it's such an easy way," said Miss Muffet, "I wonder that nobody has thought of it before."

Into his overcoat pocket

There is not time to tell of all that happened at the party. As to refreshments, the Old Woman

Red Riding-Hood's Grandmother began to dance

who lived on victuals and drink declared that victuals and drink were nothing to the good things which Miss Muffet had provided. Before the

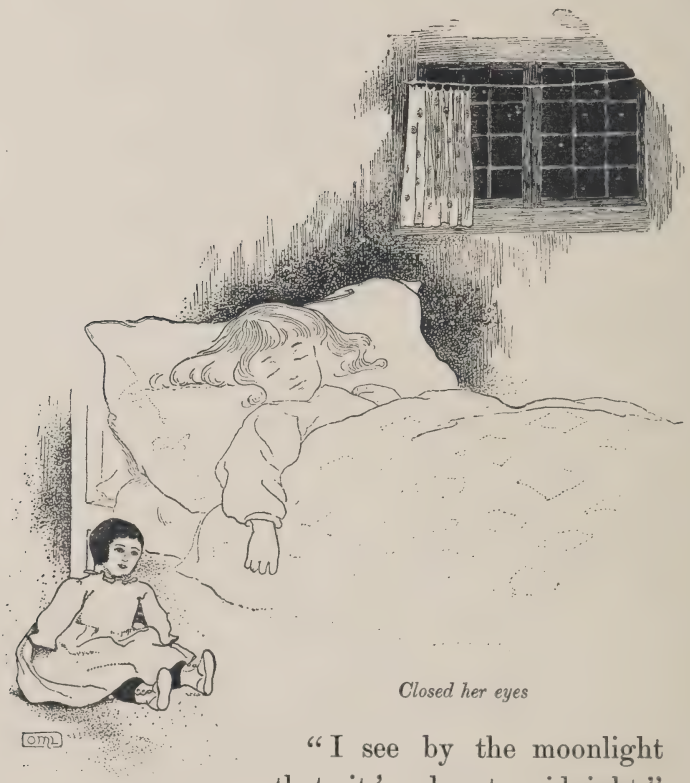
evening was over the Pied Piper played so merrily that even Red Riding-Hood's Grandmother began to dance. The Twelve Dancing Princesses said that it was the first time that they had been able to dance as much as they liked. Before this they had had to stop when they danced the soles off their shoes; but this evening the spider had thoughtfully provided each one with several pairs.

And how did it end? All of a sudden, lights out, cobweb broken, and Miss Muffet left alone with her curds and whey? Not at all. It ended as all good parties end. The Rockaby Lady from Hushaby Street suggested that it was getting late. Then one by one the guests came to Little Miss Muffet and told her what a good time they had had, and how glad they were that Christmas comes once every year. Wynken, Blynken, and Nod sailed away in a wooden shoe. They were such dear little fellows that Miss Muffet was sorry that she had n't noticed them till they came to say good-by. Mr. Esop put out the lights in his pavilion; and the Arabians mounted their camels and rode slowly toward Bagdad, first making the Sultana promise to tell them a story that would last through the whole Arabian Night. The Wonderlanders put on their queer bonnets and coats, all carefully

wrong side out; and the Man Friday hoisted his umbrella to keep the dew off Robinson Crusoe; and Doctor Gulliver put all the Lilliputians he could catch into his overcoat pocket; and Mother Goose flew away with all her family into the night. The little people from the North were the last to

A long time to get on their overshoes

get away, for it took them a long time to get on their overshoes and fur coats and mufflers, but at last they too had gone.



Closed her eyes

"I see by the moonlight that it 's almost midnight," said the spider. "It 's time for little girls to go to sleep."

Little Miss Muffet closed her eyes very tightly indeed, but she did n't close her ears, so she heard the first tinkle of sleigh-bells far away, and she knew that Santa Claus was coming.

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